

DEAN'S REFLECTION #7

FACING 13 STRIKES: CALIFORNIA IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACY!

My fellow Californians -

Last week I released my "Introduction" to the following REFLECTIONS on California's prolonged economic and political crisis. Here is our situation as I see it today. We face an unprecedented combination of institutional and structural problems, which I will characterize as California's "13 STRIKES." Far beyond the development of the current recall movement, or the abilities of any governor, these problems demand a comprehensive approach that engages the widest array of economic, political, social and religious groups.

I am writing this critique in the hopes that representatives of all Californians will pause in the midst of our current political maelstrom to reflect on how we might altogether collectively and cooperatively address our state's long-term challenges.

A failure to address California's long-term issues and the continuation of political warfare rather than political collaboration will increase our decline into democratic dysfunction.

As I indicated last week, I will follow this reflection on California's crisis with my Dean's Reflection #8 - proposing my comprehensive program to meet our "13 Strikes" and to address our crisis. That document will be released next week. I invite everybody who reads this critique to respond, to look for other formulations that better capture the peculiar combination of crises that we confront, and to proffer their own solutions to our gathering storm, altogether for all of us Californians to consider, deliberate and adopt.

Here are the 13 Strikes which I see threatening our state and our people.

13 Strikes:

- 1. OUR RECESSIONARY ECONOMY, WITHOUT A STATE DESIGN FOR REBUILDING IT.**
- 2. OUR BANKRUPT STATE BUDGET.**
- 3. OUR CONSTITUTIONAL GRIDLOCK IMPOSED BY 2/3 VOTE REQUIREMENTS ON PASSING OUR STATE BUDGET AND TAX INCREASES.**
- 4. THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF CAMPAIGN DOLLARS AND THE PROCESS OF GETTING THEM.**
- 5. CAMPAIGNS THAT ARE TOO PROLONGED, HOLLOW AND NEGATIVE.**
- 6. LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS THAT ARE TOO LARGE.**
- 7. TERM LIMITS THAT ARE TOO SHORT.**
- 8. REAPPORTIONMENT THAT IS TOO PARTISAN.**
- 9. GOVERNORS WHO SHOW SCANT SIGNS OF COLLABORATION.**
- 10. REPUBLICANS WHO SHOW SCANT SIGNS OF COMPASSION TO MATCH THEIR CONSERVATISM.**
- 11. DEMOCRATS WHO SHOW SCANT SIGNS OF A WILLINGNESS TO SAY "NO" TO DEMANDS.**
- 12. A CITIZENRY WHICH IS SYSTEMATICALLY MISINFORMED BY A MEDIA THAT SHOWS LITTLE SIGN OF APPRECIATING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JOURNALISM, COMMERCE AND ENTERTAINMENT.**
- 13. THROUGHOUT, A PROFOUND AND PERVASIVE LACK OF TRUST - IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, THE ECONOMIC ELITES AND OUR FELLOW CALIFORNIANS.**

Each of these 13 strikes by itself poses a serious threat to the future well-being of the State and the People of California. Their combination exacerbates each and spins off others, altogether creating the perfect storm of enduring problems, quick-fix answers and an avoidance of root causes.

What I propose is our frank examination of each of these 13 strikes, prompting dialogue and argument among my fellow representatives and fellow Californians. Next week I will release my Dean's Reflection #8 - a package of 12 Steps which address many of these strikes. Several of

these proposals will form the basis of a Senate Constitutional Amendment I will introduce; others will require legislative action; yet others will require organizing outside the political process. Some are going to be structured, some cultural, some attitudinal, some fiscal, some economic. All of them together are essential for California's recovery.

A knowing friend has cautioned me regarding the risk of using metaphors - that each might well be read or experienced far differently (from each other, and/or from my own intention in utilizing such) by differing readers.

I hope to alleviate any such concerns you may find regarding my using such:

I choose to use the term "13 STRIKES" - to readily, in a familiar reference, illustrate the cumulative character of their presence and operation in our midst, to demonstrate the enormity of their cumulative effect; I do not intend it to convey any sense of finality - I have far too much faith in our California talent and spirit, to surrender to that fate.

I choose to use the term "12 STEPS" - to readily, in a familiar reference, illustrate the cumulative character of their presence and operation in our midst, to demonstrate the essentiality of them all in designing an effective sustaining solution; I do not intend it to convey any sense of surrender of our own power and responsibility - in fact, my call is precisely the opposite, that we Californians, individually and altogether, have both the personal responsibility and within us the power to meet our crisis, and to overcome it.

Here is detail regarding each of our "13 Strikes":

1. OUR RECESSIONARY ECONOMY, WITHOUT A STATE DESIGN FOR REBUILDING IT.

Two years ago the State of California's economy had grown so rapidly that we constituted the 5th largest economy in the world. Some experts were predicting the Dow Jones Average would hit the 35,000 mark, unemployment and inflation were low, interest rates were moderate, euphoria was high. We Californians, in our private as well as in our public sectors, always imbued with an slightly extravagant sense of our "can-do" abilities, thought it would last forever.

Then the bubble burst. The extravagant investment in unproven .com products for untested .com markets collapsed, taking down with it major elements of our extraordinary high-tech sector, and trailing behind it the busted dreams of both investors and employees. Our unemployment rate jumped above 6% - where it remains today. Long-term growth in electronics, software, information technology, and related manufacturing sectors fell flat, as we faced new competition from abroad.

And, despite the repeated efforts of the Federal Reserve Bank to lower the cost of money, and the almost comical efforts of the national administration to spark recovery by tax breaks to the wealthy, the economy remains flat.

While there is talk of recovery, or the early signs of reinvestment, there doesn't seem to be any drop in unemployment, and our enormous gap between the "Haves" and the Have-nots" continues to grow. California faces the erosion of our vaunted Middle Class, as legions of moderate wage workers have trouble holding on to their jobs, with the accompanying loss of their purchasing power.

Then, to complicate matters, the State of California has no strategic plan for anticipating, much less coping with, such an economic downturn. The California Economic Strategy Panel (created through a bipartisan effort of a Democratic legislative "prosperity team" and Republican Governor Wilson's Commission on the California Economy) is only now framing a new approach to our ailing economy and to our economic recovery.

2. OUR BANKRUPT STATE BUDGET.

The collapse of the .com economy provided an immediate collapse of state revenues, in a spiral that includes the loss of stock option taxes, income tax revenue, business and sales tax revenues. On the surface it's pretty simple: when the economy is booming, more people are employed, businesses invest, buy, and grow. Throughout this growth people pay both income and sales tax; these revenues rise as people earn and buy more. Simultaneously, low unemployment lowers the draw on state funds for social and health services. As the economy sours, demands for state spending increases. Our current structural deficit stems from increased state spending and overall flatlined revenues.

As an example of the revenue impacts of direct and indirect actions, our state income tax from the sale of hitech stock options dropped in one year alone by \$10.5 billion between 2001 and 2002. Separately, through a variety of budget actions and bills between 1997 and 2001, we reduced revenues through tax reductions and credits by another \$6.5 billion.

In its worst case, our shortfall added up to \$38 billion during the budget deliberations this past Spring (the largest deficit of any state in United States history). This required us to address it in three essential components:

- 1 - Paying off our \$8 billion deficit from our past year; +
- 2 - Balancing our coming 2003-04 budget year; +
- 3 - Addressing our structural ongoing budget deficit for future years.

Altogether, no small task.

Granted, we ought to have been more prudent in previous years, and recognized that the run-up in our economy was bound to collapse at some point. But prudence is seldom the hallmark of our human behavior when things are flush, and our constituents demanded increases in education, health care, social services-long delayed through the previous downturns.

And, it wasn't like we spent all our money in prior years frivolously. If you simply computed for annual increases to meet population growth in various programs and the cost of inflation

affecting the purchasing power of all government programs, that alone would have accounted for all but \$500 million of the \$38 billion of increase in state and local government spending in California over the past decade.

Further, our spending went almost entirely into:

- Education,
- Child care and health care for our needy children, and
- Supporting the California prison system.

Our current crisis, then, is framed by the significant prior increase in spending on state priorities, the rapid collapse of the .com economy, the resulting loss of one third of state revenues, our budgetary discretion limited by federal mandates and previous ballot initiatives like Prop 13 and Prop 98, a dysfunctional tax system, enormous expenses from an aging population in need of medical care and a growing youth population in need of education, combined with a mushrooming prison population due to "3 Strikes and You're Out" policies.

Our budget "solutions" to date have been patchwork measures designed to get us through our crisis, but not beyond it in a sustainable balanced way. We borrow through bonds, we move money from one priority to the next, and we make savage cuts in programs the public wants us to sustain-despite not wanting us to raise the tax revenues to finance these programs.

And, when we do cut - as cut we must - we also often cut off the life blood of our future. Less education means a less well prepared workforce and a less civil society; less health care means more costly sickness; less social welfare means a spike in child poverty. At the same time we are threatened by business flight if we raise the taxes necessary to support what our future needs.

In this context, we desperately need statesmen and women, partnership and collaboration, maturity and a generosity of mind - altogether deepened trust, if we are to have any hopes of coming up with a sufficient strategic action plan to right our economy and our fiscal house, and to assure our improved future. Most critically, those who most well-off need to assess just how much they can really afford to contribute to our social future, and corporations need to honestly assess whether they can make a greater tax contribution in the name of a healthy future, an improved workforce and expanded markets.

3. OUR CONSTITUTIONAL GRIDLOCK IMPOSED BY 2/3 VOTE REQUIREMENTS ON PASSING OUR STATE BUDGET AND TAX INCREASES.

California is one of only three states in the United States (the others are Rhode Island and Arkansas) which has a two-thirds legislative vote requirement for enacting our state budget, along with the same requirement of popular votes for imposing or increasing any tax.

This super-majority requirement in passing our state budget contradicts the norms of a representative democracy - that of majority rule. Especially with no political party almost ever amassing a 2/3's majority in either of our houses of the Legislature, this is an almost sure recipe for gridlock, allowing for tyranny of the minority against the will of the people, with the

California public having little sense of whom to hold accountable for our impasse. Our super-majority vote requirement makes it almost impossible for our voting public to discern precisely who it is that is letting them down in budget matters.

Finally, Proposition 13's requirement that no new taxes be imposed absent a 2/3 vote of the people imposes the heavy hand of a particular tax rebellion on the legitimate needs of a current majority. Especially since Proposition 13 allows many businesses to avoid a reassessment of taxable value, the inequities of the property tax remain uncorrected unless 2/3 of the people see fit to amend its provisions.

4. THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF CAMPAIGN DOLLARS AND THE PROCESS OF GETTING THEM.

If accumulated wealth is a sign of Calvinist redemption, the process of accumulating political donations is the road to perdition. The dependency of contemporary campaigns on massive fundraising has utterly distorted the political process, pulling candidates away from their mass base to the special interests who can afford to support them.

It takes an obscene amount of money to be a viable candidate today. And it gets worse every year. In my initial primary election in 1966, I was successful after having spent only \$21,000 in my six-candidate primary election, and \$19,000 in my general election. In 1996, to get myself elected to the California State Senate, I spent more than a half million dollars in my primary alone (my general election cost far less in a district decidedly Democratic).

This meant I had to spend four hours every morning, four days of every week, for five months, on the telephone, begging for money. That is so demeaning, so disheartening, such an awful waste of my (any candidate's) good time - time that would be far better spent listening to constituents and learning about the complex challenges facing our state today.

Today, with even longer campaigns and more expensive uses of television, a typical contested legislative race can cost more than \$1 million and some legislative races actually exceed what it costs to run statewide! In our last Governor's race, candidates spent more than \$109 million.

Despite all honest good efforts, that money does not always come free, without expectation and/or obligation on the parts of the donor and/or the candidate. I recall way back in the 1980s, when I was chairing the Assembly Ways and Means Committee, seeing a tiny inconsequential bill fail miserably on its first round of voting, then suddenly surge and get approved when a certain very prominent and well-heeled lobbyist showed up in the room.

Only this year, Senator Jackie Speier's privacy bill - supported by the People of California in good polling by 90%, couldn't gain the votes it needed in a key Assembly committee - at a time when the Public Records Act revealed that the members of that committee who hadn't voted for the bill had averaged \$74,000 each from the special interest companies opposing the bill. Several weeks later, when those companies removed their opposition, those members voted for the bill. At least, it appeared to be awful!

It is simply impossible to protect our legislative process from the ever increasing corrosive influence of special interest contributions. It is more and more the special interests, rather than our public interest, that is driving the course of legislation here in our State Capitol - amounting increasingly to a government - of the dollars, for the dollars, and by the dollars.

5. CAMPAIGNS THAT ARE TOO PROLONGED, HOLLOW AND NEGATIVE.

The finest purpose of a political campaign ought be to educate all of our voters, so that each of them is equipped to make in the coming election the wisest choices regarding who is going to represent us in governing our fine state.

Today, instead, California political campaigns have largely become lengthy boring marathons of cynical negative attacks upon each other by candidates who appear to have nothing more to offer us than the message that s/he is the lesser of two evils.

It's no wonder that our citizenry is turned off to politics. No wonder that they have utterly lost confidence in those of us who survive this awful process, and get elected.

For throughout a campaign, almost all our voters ever hear from each candidate is how bad and frightening the other is; and then the candidate who survives that process, and get elected - almost all we ever hear about her/him from the media is how awful s/he is.

The latest figures show that apathy has grown so much that voter turnout has dropped to 50% of eligible voters who bother to register, and of those, only 36% bother to vote.

Three tragic components contribute and amount to our biannual election plague - far too long a campaign season, too much influence by cynical campaign consultants and too much negative disheartening campaigning.

Our Early March Primary

Only a few years ago (the legislation was chaptered in 1993 but was not implemented until 1996), in an effort to make the State of California a more influential player in the selection of each of our respective major party's nominees for the Presidency of the United States, we moved our presidential primary up to March. That was a good idea!

Then, in order to save the cost of an additional election, so as to make that shift more palatable with our voters, we moved our state election primaries, for our constitutional officers and for our California State Senators and Assemblymembers to that earlier date as well. That was a terrible idea!

That means that for elections that are going to be finally resolved in the November general elections, our primary elections are a full eight months earlier in March, which in turn means that

campaigning for the primary elections begins 3-4 months ahead of that - altogether presenting us with year-long campaigns for the various state executive and legislative offices.

That is a formula that in no way serves a public interest; it is instead fraught with peril.

For in fact, typical Californians, who have lives to live and families to support and work to engage in for that purpose, haven't time to pay any real attention to election campaigns until at very most the final month before the respective elections, primary or general.

So what happens during that long dark period leading up to that final month before election? Candidates struggle ever more to figure out something new and different to say: having run out of positive things, the negativities increase. Campaign consultants employ their wily wares in ever more cynical ways, seeking to frighten and manipulate our voters.

Every other year from January through November, California voters are harangued and harassed by reams of direct mail, hours of TV sound-bites posing as serious debate, and endless dinner-time phone calls from candidates and independent expenditure committees. Our exceptionally long campaign season exacerbates costs of campaigns and contributes to apathy and low voter turnout.

What good comes out of that? Our voters get bored, our candidates get both exhausted and demeaned by the ever more lengthy hours we must spend raising money to sustain such long campaigns. The only winners are the campaign consultants, most of whom appear to grow only ever cynical, and ever more wealthy, and ever more egomaniacal. None of it accrues to our general public interest.

Our Cynical Campaign Consultants

For most of them, any means to the end of winning an election (or a majority) is fair game, they have done more to destroy any possibility of faith in our democratic system than have any politicians, any media folks, everybody else put together; almost all of them subscribe to, and practice, the very worst kind of politics - the politics of fear rather than the politics of trust and hope.

6. LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS THAT ARE TOO LARGE.

Our current formulation of California State legislative representation – 40 districts and seats in our California State Senate and 80 districts and seats in our California State Assembly - was set up in 1879. Shortly thereafter in the 1883 apportionment, the entire population of the State of California was 1.2 million - so that each of our 40 State Senators represented 21,500 constituents, and each of our 80 State Assemblypersons represented 10,600 constituents. Representative democracy was both an ideal and a feasible reality.

Now, in 2003, the population of the State of California has grown to 34 million human beings - with no change at all in the number of our Senate or Assembly districts. As a result, each

California State Senator now is charged with representing 850,000 constituents, each California State Assemblyperson is charged with representing 425,000 constituents.

That is beyond the capacity of any human being. It is impossible. A real representative democracy is fast slipping away from us.

Each of our districts has far too many residents to allow for a legislator being much at all personal, knowing very many of her/his constituents, or engaging in the kind of meaningful political exchange and dialogue upon which democratic experiences and values can thrive.

We have a 19th century Legislature for a 21st century California!

7. TERM LIMITS THAT ARE TOO SHORT.

In 1990 the People of the State of California enacted term limits for state legislators, among the most stringent of any state in our nation. A person now can serve as a member of the California State Assembly for no more than three two-year terms, six years total, ever. A person now can serve as a member of the California State Senate for no more than two four-year terms, eight years total, ever.

While the idea seemed attractive in the abstract, it is proving a disaster in the concrete.

Term limits have left our Legislature - under our Constitution intended to be a co-equal branch of government - almost fatally handicapped – without the memory, relationships, or loyalty which are necessary conditions for the development and enactment of sound public policy, for carrying us through our most bitter debates, our most daunting problems and challenges.

The trouble with our term limits for the California Legislature is the very same trouble you'd experience if just about every time you went to your doctor, or your auto mechanic, or your teacher - you found somebody you'd never seen before, some body just out of school who's just arrived there without any experience in knowing who you are, what you need - much less how to go about attending to the precious dimensions of your life.

For the California Legislature has the authority, and the responsibility, to attend to the needs of all of us, all 35 million of us Californians, and its mission and endeavors are every bit as personal, as crucial, as central and as complex as are those of the individuals who attend to your own personal needs.

Term Limits does more than impose a raw impersonality to the legislative process. It transfers power to lobbyists and the better organized interests, as well as long-time bureaucrats. Why? Because new legislators simply do not have time to master the intricacies and details the policies governing each element of public life on which they must vote. So they turn to those who purport to know the details—staff, lobbyists, organizational representatives. At least in the case of lobbyists, these are often the same persons legislators must turn to for fund-raising.

Term Limits are, ironically, a way to preserve the status quo, or at best for never getting changes more than cosmetic or at best gradualism - at a time and in a state which is at the frontier of a profoundly changing world. It is not possible for a legislator to develop in 6 or even 8 years the kind of stature and reputation, or gain enough respect and trust for vision, for smarts and for integrity that inspires colleagues to grow willing to follow, that enables a legislator to move colleagues to recognize new directions and take radical steps to keep ourselves and the State of California up with our changing times.

Finally, Term Limits are a recipe for screaming stupidity - rather than well-informed smart and wise leadership - at a time when we're facing the most profound challenges in our entire human history. For from the very 1st day your new legislator arrives to take office in the Capitol, s/he knows s/he has only four (or six) years to make a name for him/herself so as to be able to seek "higher office." So instead of investing her/his first years listening and learning, s/he begins immediately to scream and shout, hoping to gain the attention of the media (which seem to only pay attention to the screamers and shouters), so as to impress all the folks back home, so they'll be ripe and ready to vote for him/her to move on to some other office when term limits ends his/her stay in this one.

8. REAPPORTIONMENT THAT IS TOO PARTISAN.

Under our California Constitution, the districts of our two houses of our California Legislature are redrafted (in a process known as reapportionment) after each decade's new census, so that each and all of the districts in each house of the Legislature has/have almost exactly the same number of constituents (to meet the "One person, one vote" equality requirement of our United States Constitution, as ordained by the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Baker vs. Carr* in 1965.

So far, so good.

Yet, under our current system, such a reapportionment plan is designed by the legislators currently holding office - who are often concerned about and committed to assuring their own continuing electoral viability.

Even that isn't all by itself all bad. But, in this most recent reapportionment plan, the leaders of our two major political parties called a self interest truce, and agreed to maintain the same electoral balance between the parties that was then existing in each house of the Legislature.

That was accomplished by loading up more Democrats into each district then held by Democrats, and more Republicans into each district then held by Republicans.

The result: In our 2002 elections, we did get almost the same number of Democrats and Republicans in each house (actually, the Republicans gained one Senate seat and two Assembly seats), yet most of both the Republicans and the Democrats who won their own party primary and went on to be elected in the general election, were less in the center, more to the right or to

the left. They occupied not only safe seats, but more partisan seats.

So, when it came time for us to come together and seek to collaborate in passing a budget this past Spring, there was little middle ground, fewer persons committed to it, and that division took us way past our constitutional deadline for passing our state budget, and almost into disaster. In addition, our current partisan reapportionment plan - in so tilting each of its districts one way or the other, left us with only 17 - out of 120 - legislative districts that are politically competitive. The rest of the seats were guaranteed to one or the other of our 2 major political parties.

That was fine for incumbents. Whoever held the seat got a district drawn for his/her party, and winner of the party primary will almost always go on to become the winner of the general election.

And, since the "base" voter within each of our major political parties most often holds the most extreme (left or right) positions on key issues, it has become very difficult to elect moderate thinkers or to craft moderate solutions for problems needing attention by the Legislature.

9. GOVERNORS WHO SHOW SCANT SIGNS OF COLLABORATION.

The best example was provided by our current governor, early on in his very first term in office, when he told the Editorial Board of the San Francisco Chronicle that, "The Legislature is in the Capitol for the purpose of carrying out my vision."

That's not the way I ever read our California State Constitution – which prides itself (as does our national system of government) on our having three co-equal branches of government, altogether providing a system of checks and balances.

Far too often, especially facing major crises, governors seem far more inclined to attempt to act unilaterally and impose his vision upon all the rest of us, instead of inviting us altogether into a collaborative effort which always has a much greater capacity for leading to smart pragmatic operational solutions.

One has to admit that Gray Davis isn't alone in this style and attitude. Previous governors often shared his confusion about the balance of powers, especially if they were intent on positioning themselves for national campaigns.

I am pleased to acknowledge I have been experiencing more signs of collaboration on the part of our governor.

10. REPUBLICANS WHO SHOW SCANT SIGNS OF COMPASSION TO MATCH THEIR CONSERVATISM.

It seems descriptively fair to say that Republicans are far more often aligned with those Californians who have more in the way of wealth and/or opportunity and, not surprisingly, are therefore more likely to be allied with, and gain a significant proportion of our campaign funds from, those special interest groups who represent employers and/or the wealthy, and/or otherwise privileged (there are, of course, notable exceptions).

Whether then it's their own character structure, or their allegiances and alliances (in fact, it's likely some fusion and balance of each and both of those) – the current batch of elected Republicans seem to be more fixed on order, structure, hierarchy, wealth and privilege. Compassion isn't readily to be found in those arenas.

In addition, at times some of our current Republican colleagues appear to be operating out of a mentality that if you're rich, you're seemingly "God's chosen people," and if you're poor, there's something inherently wrong with you, too bad. No wonder that leaves them unwilling to vote to raise taxes and willing to leave unattended our poor fellow Californians who are hungry, homeless, ignorant and/or sick.

Judging from their own pronouncements ("We will never vote for any revenue increases!"), together with repeated widespread reports of rampant intimidation within their own Republican caucuses by the more conservative of their members toward their members more moderate, it seems like the majority of Republicans are wedded to wealth more than anything else. They show little sign of commitment to the community of our entire human family, especially to those amongst our family who are most in need of assistance to enable them to keep pace with the rest of us.

Further, it must be noted that there are Republicans amongst us who would gladly render our government dysfunctional - since it is government that primarily stands in the way of their constituencies worst actions, those that gravely threaten our well-being, even our sustained being upon this planet earth.

How ironic! They do all they can to disparage government, to cause you to lose confidence in government, which is in fact the strongest force on your behalf to save our environment and which is, ironically, the only institution in our society whose you get to s/elect its leaders.

None of this is inherent in Republicanism. Many of us who have served for years before term limits and the ascendancy of the further right have fine memories of Republican colleagues who had compassion, were committed to dialogue and compromise, and who simply disagreed about the extent to which government could solve social issues. But that was before reapportionment gave safe seats to seeming reactionaries, and the further far right made sure the Republican middle was silenced.

I am pleased to acknowledge I have been experiencing more signs of compassion on the part of our Republican colleagues.

11. DEMOCRATS WHO SHOW SCANT SIGNS OF A WILLINGNESS TO SAY "NO" TO DEMANDS.

It also seems descriptively true that Democrats are far more often aligned with those Californians who have less in the way of wealth and/or opportunity and, not surprisingly, are therefore more likely to be allied with, and gain a significant proportion of our campaign funds from, those special interest groups who represent employees and/or the poor and needy, or otherwise afflicted (there are, of course, notable exceptions).

Whether then it's their own character structure, or their allegiances and alliances, Democrats tend to be more fixed on caring, sharing, helping and providing opportunity for the less privileged, and too often lock all business leaders into the category of uncaring insensitive persons who show no sense of responsibility for the well-being of all Californians, and then go after them in ways that leave those business leaders unable and/or unwilling to proceed to make precious contributions to our state.

The increasing affiliation of Democrats with our own precious key interest groups can beget its own downside. For the elected leaders and hired lobbyists for such interest groups each year wish to score some successes they can bring/take back home to their members (it helps them hold their position).

That doesn't always augur well for making the best public policy. And, it can lead to an ever increasing cost of government/s.

Since Democrats have been in power here in the California Legislature for 36 of the last 40 years, and we have delivered consistently, there's little left, little more that we can give!

I am pleased to acknowledge I have been experiencing more signs of saying "NO" on the part of our Democratic colleagues.

12. A CITIZENRY WHICH IS SYSTEMATICALLY MISINFORMED BY A MEDIA THAT SHOWS LITTLE SIGN OF APPRECIATING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN JOURNALISM, COMMERCE AND ENTERTAINMENT.

Democracy's success depends on an informed and generous people, competent to discern the differences between candidates and policies, and able to examine the long-term consequences of what they choose. This is more than a matter of good values; it requires a working knowledge of public issues—about how institutions and markets work, and about how local things are affected by state and national policy.

How on earth are citizens supposed to learn these things, take the long view on public matters,

and judge candidates on the basis of real differences in policy and perspective? Hardly through a press and media who refuse to explore issues in depth, and treat every public policy debate as if the only stakes were the electoral outcomes.

What occurs here in our State Capitol in Sacramento is at the precious awesome intersection of the lives and hopes, aspirations and apprehensions of the now 35 million persons who have chosen to make their homes here in the State of California.

Yet, way too often, our cynical media engage themselves primarily in titillation rather than in education, treat what's going on here in our Capitol akin to Reality TV, looking and seeing and saying only what amounts to spectacle - instead of recognizing and portraying what's truly at stake. That is, if they cover Sacramento at all.

Our media most often focus far too much on the "horse race" they see going on here in the Capitol - which party is winning and which party is losing - and far too little on the critical policy questions under debate and the ramifications of various policy options.

This isn't real journalism; it's a form of entertainment aimed at selling advertising space to merchants and corporations. It doesn't educate, it doesn't inform, and it doesn't deepen the debates.

Our media is matched by candidates who dodge public debate, avoiding the tough questions, or turning all answers into attacks on their opponents. This creates a symbiosis between the media selling airtime or print ads and the campaign consultants selling edgy political satire postured as leadership.

13. THROUGHOUT, A PROFOUND AND PERVASIVE LACK OF TRUST - IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS, THE ECONOMIC ELITES AND OUR FELLOW CALIFORNIANS.

When we have all of these first 12 strikes operating and converging, we find ourselves locked in the paralyzing throes of a deadly circular conspiracy of cynicism - which readily leads us to an utter lack of trust, in our politics and in our politicians, and in our government itself.

The fact of this phenomenon has recently surfaced, become prominent in our consciousness, attested to by these four major commentaries on our politics and government scene.

a - A January 2003 column by leading Capitol skeptic George Skelton of the Los Angeles Times, proclaiming that what is most crucial and most missing in our State Capitol this year is not simply the billions of dollars missing from our State Treasury - but the utter loss and lack of trust amongst those persons we have elected to go to Sacramento and represent and govern us.

b - A January 2003 column by leading Capitol cynic Dan Walters, lamenting the loss of trust and credibility in our State Capitol.

c - The January-February 2003 double issue of The Atlantic Monthly - addressing "The State of our Nation" - featuring in its second essay lamenting that same loss of trust in government.

d - Most compelling, most frightening - Mark Baldassare's recent book, "A California State of Mind" - published in 2002, after he conducted interviews with 22,000 Californians (individually and/or in small groups). Baldassare concludes that the level of mistrust in government has grown amongst our people so large that the People of California will not provide government either the authority or the resources to be able to solve the problems they insist we address.

Altogether, that sets in motion an irreversible downward spiral of expectation and failure to fulfill it, altogether amounting to a fatal short circuit, likely to end representative democracy in our state.

What all these commentators see is the affective result of the structural and institutional contradictions we have spoken about above. If politics is combat by other means, by ever more shrill politicians speaking sound bites crafted by consultants, through a media disinterested in details, nuance, or context, in term-limited offices designed to make policy-makers stupid—then the people are right to not trust.

The problem is that the affect folds back into the institutions, draining the political world of informed constituents who demand real accountability over real policy, and hold us to the long-term consequences of our choices.

The lack of trust is then both symptom and cause, the ultimate warning and the cry for a more decent politics in which people can believe.

CONCLUSION: FROM CRISIS TO ACTION:

The capacity of the State and People of California to be a representative democracy, to govern ourselves wisely and well, to solve our problems and to create a better future for ourselves and our children and grandchildren, is fast departing us.

It is long past time that We, the People of California, measure up to the legendary "Give Us Men - and Woman - To Match Our Mountains" - so that altogether we can, and we will, for we must, come up with and commit ourselves to a smart bold comprehensive strategic action plan for addressing the enormous crisis we are experiencing, and getting California back to working again.

I have tried to provide my own summary of the critical aspects of what I consider a democratic crisis. This is a crisis for democracy, and a crisis in democracy. No sudden burst of legislative leadership will solve all these elements of the storm, but we will have to start somewhere.

I will start next week by detailing in my next "Dean's Reflection #8 - A 12-Step Recovery Program for a 13-Strike State" an approach to addressing these "strikes." Just as I invite critics and friends alike to tease apart this too-brief account of what we face, so I will invite critics and friends to argue and debate the best route to healing our wounds.

That is our collective challenge today. Let us come together now in candor, with a sense of our common destiny and our enormous collaborative capacity, to ready the ground by coming to agreement about the panoply of strikes that today besiege us with the "Perfect Storm."

It is time each and all of us Californians -

- 1 - Stopped playing the Blame Game;
 - 2 - Recognize we are all in this crisis together; and
 - 3 - Own up to and take seriously our own individual and collective responsibility to come together, and enact a massive constructive comprehensive reform that gives us hope of restoring democracy to the State of California, to and for all Californians -
- So that we once again enjoy a government -
 - Of the People, by the People and for the People of our beloved State of California!

JOHN VASCONCELLOS
Dean of the California Legislature
Representing the Heart of Silicon Valley
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